

VZCZCXYZ0431
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHSB #0140/01 0511408
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 201408Z FEB 08
FM AMEMBASSY HARARE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2502
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
RUEHAR/AMEMBASSY ACCRA 1784
RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 1910
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0489
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1187
RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 1544
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 1966
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 4395
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK
RHMFISS/EUCOM POLAD VAIHINGEN GE
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1037
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L HARARE 000140

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

AF/S FOR S. HILL,
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU
ADDIS ABABA FOR ACSS
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR E. LOKEN AND L. DOBBINS
STATE PASS TO NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR B. PITTMAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/20/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [ZI](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH PRESIDENT MUGABE

Classified By: Amb. James D. McGee for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) In a February 18 meeting with Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe, the Ambassador emphasized that U.S. policy toward Zimbabwe remained constant, but that the U.S. would look favorably upon opening a dialogue with Mugabe. A positive sign would be assurances of free and fair elections. Mugabe responded that Zimbabwe was democratic and that the U.S. was unfairly singling it out through sanctions -- the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act (ZDERA) -- which had curtailed international economic support and was largely responsible for Zimbabwe's economic plight. He could not understand the U.S. position since Zimbabwe's dispute, over land, was with the United Kingdom. The Ambassador urged Mugabe to invite international observers for the March 29 elections. Mugabe responded that Zimbabwe would not invite individuals from pro-sanction countries; their minds were already made up. A possible exception would be the Carter Center as he had positive memories of the Carter administration's support leading up to Zimbabwe's independence. Looking toward the March elections and beyond, Mugabe was dismissive of Simba Makoni. He expected to win and would stay in office "as long as I feel I can." The one issue on which Mugabe purported to agree with the Ambassador was corruption. The president agreed it was a problem and said he was intent on fighting it.

¶2. (C) Mugabe was mentally alert and appeared physically fit. From time to time he lapsed into reveries, but he appeared to have a good grasp of the issues and was forceful in making his points. END SUMMARY.

¶3. (C) The Ambassador met with Mugabe on February 18 in Mugabe's office at Zimbabwe House. The meeting was bifurcated; notetakers left after the first half and the

Ambassador used a one-on-one with the Zimbabwean president to emphasize that U.S. policies had not changed and to expand on the discussion of the first half.

U.S. Policy and Election Observers

¶4. (C) The Ambassador told Mugabe that our principles and policies remained the same. We would look favorably upon opening a dialogue with him. A positive sign of his willingness to engage would be assurances of free and fair elections and a level playing field for all parties. The Ambassador noted that election observers could be an important part of this process.

¶5. (C) Mugabe responded by launching into a defense of Zimbabwe's democratic process. Zimbabwe had held regular elections every five years and was not new at the game. The government was "open, fair, legitimate, and transparent," and would not tolerate cheating or an unfair election result. In fact, he added, in the area of elections Zimbabwe was a model for Africa, for developing countries, and for many developed countries.

¶6. (C) Mugabe stated that observers from friendly countries would be welcome in order to allay any concerns about the elections. Observers from pro-sanction countries, however, would not be invited. They were biased and already had their minds made up. In particular, he said, no one from the United Kingdom would be invited. In response to a question from the Ambassador, Mugabe said an invitation to the Carter Center would be considered. The Jimmy Carter administration had been "good, kind, and supportive," and had saved the constitutional process at Lancaster House in London in 1979. It had also offered to assist on the land issue. Mugabe added that some in his administration had already suggested an invitation to the Carter Center, but a decision on the Center, or for that matter any other observers, had not yet been made. Who to invite might be decided later in the week.

(NOTE: The Carter Center has informed USAID Harare that it is too late for it to send an observation team. At the most, it could send a survey team that would not publicly comment on the elections. END NOTE.)

U.S. Principles and Sanctions

¶7. (C) As a prelude to a discussion on sanctions, Mugabe queried the Ambassador as to why the U.S. had interjected itself into the historical UK-Zimbabwe quarrel over land. Zimbabwe had not offended the U.S. in any way. It had had democracy for 27 years and, in contrast to the Smith regime, had instituted majority rule, one man-one vote, and gender equality. Yet President Bush thought Zimbabwe was as bad as Sudan and maybe Pakistan. Mugabe concluded that the U.S. had decided to impose sanctions as a demonstration of solidarity with its fellow Anglo-Saxons, and as a reciprocal gesture to Prime Minister Tony Blair for supporting the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

¶8. (C) Mugabe said sanctions were "effective and encompassing" and "were hurting more than you know." Visa sanctions were an irritant but financial sanctions, e.g., ZDERA, which the U.S. used to prevent international loans to Zimbabwe, were at the heart of Zimbabwe's economic problems. He claimed he and Simba Makoni had been present at a meeting where the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank said they needed U.S. and UK approval for loans to Zimbabwe.

¶9. (C) The Ambassador asked why the African Development Bank did not provide financial assistance to Zimbabwe. Mugabe replied that it was controlled by the West. Even China was becoming less willing to help because of U.S. pressures.

¶10. (C) When Mugabe asserted the U.S. should reconsider its policies toward Zimbabwe, the Ambassador responded that the

U.S. had made clear its principles regarding reengagement with Zimbabwe. These included free and fair elections, a return to the rule of law, respect for human rights, and responsible economic policy. Mugabe in turn became animated.

"No rule of law? Look at the rest of Africa." As for human rights, Mugabe argued that in some respects Zimbabwe was superior to the U.S. The Ambassador reminded Mugabe that when he presented his credentials Mugabe had asked him to view Zimbabwe for himself and not prejudge the situation. He had done just that and had confirmed the beating of peaceful demonstrators after President Mbeki's visit to Zimbabwe in January. Mugabe disingenuously replied that if we supplied him with names of perpetrators of violence he would see they were brought to justice.

On Mugabe's Future and Makoni

¶11. (C) Mugabe indicated to the Ambassador that he assumed he would win the March elections. He said he would stay on as president "as long as I feel I can." His successor would be determined by the party, although he would obviously have an interest and a say in the decision.

¶12. (C) The Ambassador tried to draw Mugabe out on Simba Makoni. Mugabe did not express worry about Makoni, but also appeared disinclined to discuss him. He did say that Makoni was not as strong as he had expected. He also rhetorically asked why Makoni had run as an independent. As president, but without a party, under the Zimbabwean system he would find it impossible to find ministers to form a cabinet. (NOTE: As Mugabe explained, ministers must come from Parliament. If parliamentarians abandon their party, they lose their seat in Parliament. END NOTE.)

A Note on Corruption

¶13. (C) The Ambassador asked Mugabe about the rampant corruption in the country in general, and in ZANU-PF in particular. For once agreeing with the Ambassador, Mugabe said it was out of control. He told the Ambassador that the U.S. had more "eyes and ears" in Zimbabwe and South Africa than he did. If we brought corrupt individuals, even family members, to his attention he would take action.

Alert and Engaged

¶14. (C) Mugabe greeted the Ambassador with a firm handshake. He was alert and mentally acute during the almost one-hour meeting and was on top of the issues presented by the Ambassador. He punctuated the discussion with recollections stretching from the Lancaster House agreement to his conversation with the Ambassador on November 24 when the Ambassador presented his credentials. His voice was steady and, for the most part, he maintained good eye contact with the Ambassador. His only display of age came on a couple of occasions when he engaged in reveries about the past. At one point, for example, with a lowered voice and averted gaze, he said to the Ambassador, "I had a profession. I gave it up for my people and my country. I spent 11 years of my life in prison for what I knew to be right. You lose a lot in 11 years in prison. I'm not Nelson Mandela, but I know I am doing the right things for Zimbabwe."

COMMENT

¶15. (C) Whether he is in denial, or isolated, or both, Mugabe gives the impression that he believes Zimbabwe is democratic and that its economic woes are the result of unjustifiable Western actions. He appears to genuinely lament the estrangement with the West, but of course places

all the blame on others. As he took his leave, the Ambassador suggested they continue to talk. Mugabe responded, "Come back and see me." END COMMENT.

MCCEE